



ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED LOBBYISTS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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ACCREDITATION OF LOBBYING, PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COURSES

Today, lobbying, public Affairs and government relations practitioners suffer from low recognition. There is a shortage of qualified practitioners, a lack of regulation and a lack of credibility. Although the industry has grown at a fast pace, the profession has not yet matured in terms of achieving a professional status in the eyes of society as a whole. It is precisely due to the lack of any appropriate regulations that quasi-lobbying in many countries is perceived as an activity which is illegitimate, privy of a narrow circle and latent. This, undoubtedly nurtures its image of negative stereotypes in society's consciousness.

The establishment of high standards is therefore critical not only to professionalizing lobbying, public affairs and government relations activities but also to having a positive impact on the public.

There is a huge spread of quality in lobbying, public affairs and government relations studies. Many are too broad and end up offering little in depth training in any of the key skills sets required. Others seem to have too narrow view of the field. Lobbying and government relations is not a "one size fits all" process and in order to understand the "art" and "science" of lobbying many disciplines need to be considered including practical politics, political science, law, history, psychology, urban affairs, economics and public policy. Such courses as developing strategies, methods for dealing with elected and unelected government officials, communication skills, conduct for working with clients and policy makers, business development, client and project management, political intelligence gathering, understanding of legislative, regulatory and procurement processes are fundamentals. Specialized and thorough training programmes are not easy to come by and their quality is not subject to any kind of assessment. Those that offer a one-day advanced course on developing lobbying strategies and executing lobbying campaigns cannot be really treated seriously.

In order to further the professional development of lobbying, public affairs and government relations practitioners there is a need for the establishment of steady development of approved curricula. Exclusive academic and/or professional qualifications must be clearly set up to demonstrate the substantial and rigorous knowledge and skills of the profession. Qualifying examinations should be offered to evaluate the levels of practitioners' competencies and continuous professional development should be mandatory for all members to expand their knowledge and skills.

For this reason, accreditation should be the hallmark of excellence in the training of lobbying, public affairs and government relations practitioners providing a world-class standard that is

recognized by public institutions, clients and employers as the best indication that new practitioners have the fundamental skills and knowledge needed to perform their work.

Accreditation courses should deliver vocational training to a high standard that everyone concerned with the quality of lobbying, public affairs and government relations practitioners understands and values.

Accreditation of courses is a confirmation that the course :

- meets industry, enterprise or community needs
- provides appropriate competency outcome and a satisfactory basis for assessment
- meets national quality assurance requirements
- the registered training organization can issue a nationally recognized qualification or Statement of Attainment following its full completion

The Accreditation process should be fair, reasonable, straight forward and professional.

AIMS OF THE AALEP ACCREDITATION PROCESS

1. To accredit courses that are promoted clearly and compellingly to students seeking a qualification that is widely recognized and valued by public institutions, clients or employers.
2. To accredit courses where students are selected on the basis of ability and the potential to succeed in a career in lobbying, public affairs and government relations.
3. To accredit courses that are committed to fostering a safe, supportive and inclusive environment.
4. To accredit courses where the AALEP syllabus is delivered effectively and in full by knowledgeable and experienced teaching staff.
5. To accredit courses where there is an integrated approach to teaching with formal classroom tuition linked to practical Lobbying, Public Affairs and Government Relations that reflects current developments.
6. To accredit courses whose providers are dedicated to a culture of continuous improvement based on well-developed and coherent quality management process.
7. To accredit courses where staff are able to carry out the required administrative and examination functions in a timely and professional manner.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

There are five stages involved in gaining accreditation.

- (1) **Application Form** to be filled out
- (2) **Advisory Visit:** To discuss your course plans. This is optional but we strongly recommend it as the best way to speed up the process and iron out any potential obstacles
- (3) **Accreditation Visit:** Meeting with the course leader and key staff to discuss accreditation documents, AALEP exam take-up and performance and other issues. Meeting in private with as many students as possible.
- (4) **Course Accreditation:** To be accredited a course must deal primarily with the specialized body of knowledge required by a professional lobbying, public affairs and

government relations practitioners including ethics, professional standards. It must be taught by persons who are qualified by practical or academic experience in the subjects covered and should include the distribution of good quality written materials pertaining to the subjects covered. Accreditation is granted for a maximum of two years, in some instances accreditation may be granted for a shorter period subject to certain conditions being met with a specified time. New courses, can expect to be granted accreditation for a year. Similarly courses where certain elements require attention or adjustment will be offered accreditation strictly on condition that remedial action is taken within the time specified by AALEP.

- (5) **Exams:** Accreditation is only awarded to those providers who meet (and continue to meet) the Industry Standards for lobbying, public affairs and government relations courses. AALEP believes that all students on any course it accredits should enter and pass its professional exams in addition to any assessments required by the course provider. It is these exams that distinguish AALEP accredited lobbying, public affairs and government relations courses from the many others, and the Diploma in Lobbying, Public Affairs and Government Relations is what the overwhelming majority of employers want their trainees to possess. Accreditation will not be appropriate for those courses that seek to use AALEP's mark solely for marketing purposes but which lack sufficiently robust recruitment criteria, motivation and support to ensure adequate take-up of the AALEP's professional exams. Accreditation is withdrawn only as a last resort where performance falls irredeemably short of the required standard.